

NOTES ON MESOPOTAMIAN MAMMALS

By

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Having read the report on the Mammals of Mesopotamia in Journal Vol. XXVII, No. 2, I have realised that I have a good many Field Notes on the Mammals of that country, which may be of some value, as I served there from January 1916 until April 1918. I was principally on the Tigris, from Basra to Daur (15 miles upstream of Samarra), with a brief interval on the Euphrates at Feluja and the Hindiych Barrage from the middle of March 1917 until the middle of July that year.

PACHYURA ETRUSCA—*Pigmy Shrew*—All the records mentioned are from the Tigris. The only one I came across was at the end of March 1917 when my Regiment had just arrived at Feluja on the Euphrates. One afternoon while we were sitting in the Mess Tent, which had been dug down into the ground, a minute shrew with body no bigger than that of a bumble bee, suddenly appeared on the table, and was running about for several minutes; and although once actually imprisoned under an inverted tumbler by one of my brother officers, I failed to secure it as a specimen.

HEMIECHINUS AURITUS—*Long-eared Hedgehog*.—Again I note that all the specimens recorded are from the Tigris, though Ludlow recorded this species as plentiful at Hit, R. Euphrates. Most of my acquaintance with these animals was at Feluja on the banks of the Euphrates during March and April 1917, when I found them very common.

I kept alive all the specimens that were brought to me and for their prison dug a pit into the stiff soil, which measured 5 feet in diameter and had vertical sides nearly 4 feet in height.

At the bottom of this pit the various Hedgehog inhabitants excavated burrows on the same level as the bottom, but which had a tendency to turn upwards.

However none of the little prisoners ever escaped by digging right up to the surface, and in fact never even got as far as anywhere near it.

A pair were my first capture and they soon dug themselves in, once they were placed in the pit; the usual length of burrows they excavated was 2 to 3 feet.

I then obtained 4 youngsters a fortnight old, which apparently cried so much their first night in the pit, that two more adults, who may have been the parents, were attracted by the noise and fell in. Those youngsters never managed to dig more than a few inches into the ground. At night they were all very active and I used to watch their antics and see them feed, with the aid of an electric torch which did not seem to frighten them in the least. I fed them on bread and watered milk, raw potatoes, carrots, cucumber and other vegetables, as well as dried gram, lentils, dhal and crushed barley.

With the exception of one of the youngsters which died, they all flourished and soon became quite tame, though they kept to their burrows during the day.

I eventually let them all go, as there was a difficulty of making up and storing the skins.

As all my notes are not handy at the present moment, I cannot say where else I came across this species in Mesopotamia, although I know that I have other records which include the note of a drowned specimen found near Samarra in February 1918.

FELIS CHAUS—*Jungle Cat*.—One day in January 1916, shortly after my arrival in Mesopotamia and while on the march up the Tigris between Kurna and Ezra's Tomb, I came across one of these animals, while out small game shooting, in thick cover on the river bank in the late afternoon.

Some of my scouts told me that a Jackal was crouching in a bush and that they would catch it for me.

This they proceeded to do and after a short though fierce struggle, they emerged scratched but triumphant with the biggest and most hideous type of wild cat I have ever seen. It really was a magnificent creature, considerably larger than a Jackal and standing as it did a deal higher. In colour it was a pale, though bright brownish orange or ginger, with rich reddish brown and chestnut stripes. The beast was well secured with cloths and straps, and I had intended trying to keep it alive, but unfortunately it escaped on the way back to camp. I subsequently saw other though much smaller specimens whilst shooting in the thick cover on the banks of the Tigris and R. Adhaim at various points as far North as Daur, but failed to secure any specimens.

From March to July 1917, while on the Euphrates at Feluja and the Hindiyeh Barrage, I did not come across this species but the country that I traversed in those parts was not suitable, and thick cover was rarely visited as it was the close season for small game shooting.

In early March 1917, while shooting Hares and Black Partridge in scrub cover on the Tigris banks between Kut and Baghdad I saw a smaller type of wild cat, a greyish buff in colour and spotted blackish, at which I could not get a shot.

HERPESTES PERSICUS—*The Persian Mongoose*.—Noted principally in the Palm Groves in the vicinity of the cities of Busra, Amarah, and Baghdad on the Tigris. No specimens were secured and no type of *ICHNEUMON* ever noted. Without my notes I cannot for certain say whether I have many records of the Mongoose, from the Euphrates, but there were a lot in scrub by a palm grove near the Hindiyeh barrage, where I found a clutch of Marbled duck's eggs they had consumed.

HYÆNA HYÆNA—*The Striped Hyæna*.—When at Feluja on the R. Euphrates in March, April and May 1917, I knew of the same collection of Hyæna Earths which Ludlow mentions. They were situated a few miles north of the town in a group of low marl and gypsum mounds not very far from the river, and which actually formed a portion of the ruins of the ancient Persian fortress of Anbar, but I never came across the owner. In the broken country near the Tigris, where it is joined by the Shatt-el-Adhaim, this hyæna was quite common during October and November 1917, and on more than one occasion they were caught in the open by our pig-sticking enthusiasts and hunted for miles, but they were practically impossible to overtake even in the open country.

I often saw them out on the elevated plain above the river soon after dawn and watched them return to the broken ground, and during some manoeuvres one day we put one up in broken country as late as 11-0 in the morning. In this same area a sepoy who went off his head and wandered out into the desert and shot himself, was eaten by hyænas, who just left the skull and a few bones.

Some of our advanced posts in the broken and elevated country on either side of the Adhaim were much worried nightly by these beasts who stole many a live sheep and, though shot at, always got away unscathed with their prey.

While in camp at Bait-al-khalifa from November 1917 till March 1918, traces of hyæna were to be found everywhere in the broken country, ancient ruins and in the steep banks of the huge and ancient Nahrwan Canal, from the R. Adhaim to Daur which was as far North as I ever went. Reports of these being seen on both banks of the Tigris in those parts by reliable observers were quite frequent, though I never actually saw any myself.

CANIS AUREUS—*The Jackal*.—There is little for me to say about this species which I found exceedingly common both on the Tigris and Euphrates, wherever I happened to be in camp from 1916 to 1918. I have no special notes on their habits, except that I found them breeding freely in holes and mounds along the banks of the Magasis and other canals just down stream of Kut-el-Amarah, on the right bank of the Tigris during June 1916, when numerous litters of 5 or 6 cubs had just been born and the camps were full of youngsters kept by the

men as pets. Any scrub cover near the rivers and marshes, as well as the gardens and cover in the vicinity of towns simply swarmed with jackals.

VULPES PERSICA—*Persian Desert Fox*.—A very attractive and elegant little creature, that I was always attempting to bring to bag, though I but rarely succeeded. It seemed quite common wherever there were mounds, ancient tumuli and canal banks, etc., and was found to be very plentiful in broken country which was really suitable, such as in the vicinity of the Shatt-el-Adhaim. Being nocturnal in habits one rarely saw them except in the early morning or just before dark, though I have frequently caught them sunning themselves just outside their earths during the middle of the day. Whereas the jackal often had no alternative bolt holes, this species usually provides itself with one or more. The best way to secure specimens was to lie up over an earth in the evening and wait for them to emerge or try and catch the night reveller on his homeward journey in the early morning and even then unless shot at close quarters they frequently got in to their earths before dying.

LUTRA LUTRA—*Common Otter*.—This was an animal that I was particularly anxious to secure in Mesopotamia, but I never even saw one, though I came across their traces in the Tigris near the R. Adhaim in September, October, 1917, and in the Euphrates and marshes in the vicinity of the Hindiyeh Barrage during June and July of the same year.

JACULUS LOFTUSI—*Loftus Jerboa*.—During June and July 1916 I found this species very common indeed on the bare "pat" plains near SHEIKH SAAD on the Tigris, where we had one camp. Absolutely nocturnal in habits, they puzzled our dogs tremendously and I never saw them get caught by a dog—in fact I have frequently seen these little Jerboas leap right over their canine pursuers. Their earths go steeply into the ground for 2 or 3 feet and the little creatures evidently lie up all day in the cool, damp earth as I always noticed that captive specimens, of which we tried to keep many from time to time, suffered tremendously from the great heat during the day, even when kept in the coolest of places dug right into the grounds, so much so that we never managed to keep any alive for more than a few days. They used to eat a certain amount of grain and crushed barley. They stopped the mouths of their earths by day and came out at dusk. Occupied earths during the day were easily distinguishable by the numerous foot prints made the previous night and one only had to pour a little water down the hole to flood out the owner, who was at once bagged on appearing outside his earth. To see dozens of white tail tips moving about jerkily in the dusk was really quite uncanny.

I also came across them less plentifully on the Euphrates at Feluja (March-April—May 1917), Euphrates Barrage (June-July 1917), near Baghdad (August-September 1917) and near R. Adhaim (September-October 1917). I believe this species hibernates to a great extent during the winter months and heavy rains but do not know whether they seal up the entrances of their burrows to keep out the torrential rains.

N.B.—After writing my notes about *JACULUS LOFTUSI*, I re-read the B. N. H. S. Journal's introductory note and find that Mesopotamian specimens had only been taken on the Euphrates side. The animals to which I refer are the "Jumping Jerboas" and which I made no mistake about in each instance.

TATERA BAILWARDI—*Bailward's Gerbil*.—There is little that I know of this species except that they were common in a colony in damp ground at the edge of L. Akkarkuf near Baghdad in July-August-September 1917. I used to catch them by flooding out their holes, but it was not too easy and I think their burrows go fairly deep and long, also as far as I can remember these earths did not have the entrances stopped with earth as in the case of *Nesokia* and *Jaculus*, but here I am open to correction. They used to come out in daylight both in the early morning and evenings and travelled over a good deal of ground

during the night. I used to shoot them with a .22 bore when they came out of an evening.

NESOKIA BUXTONI—*Buxton's Mole Rat*.—I have little to add to Buxton's remarks, all of which apply to my own experience of these animals. My specimens were secured out of a colony who had their burrows on the foreshore of L. Akkalkuf-Baghdad. I frequently saw them excavating during the day in July and August, and used to shoot specimens with a .22 bore in the evening when they came half out of their burrows in the broad daylight, after I had removed the loose earth from the entrances.

MUS GENTILIS.—*House Mouse*.—Swarmed everywhere and in the vicinity of camps and supply dumps multiplied exceedingly and very swiftly. Undoubtedly there were plenty present in the country originally, in the vicinity of towns and Arab villages, but I am certain that any quantity were introduced amongst the grain sacks and fodder, as well as the wooden cases of provisions, which were a part of the army's supplies. It was quite extraordinary the way in which a camp or supply dump would be formed in the barren desert, and within a week the place would be swarming with mice, as well as with large flocks of *Passer domesticus*. I shot many in my dug-out tent in various camps, but never kept any of the skins or skulls.

ACANTHION (Sp.).—*Porcupine*.—I found this animal quite common in the broken country on either side of the Shatt-el-Adhaim during September-October and November 1917, but being entirely nocturnal I could never secure a specimen, as the earths were a long way in front of our night picket line, and also were driven into the sides of rocky mounds and the base of cliffs, and in consequence were quite impossible to dig out. In November and December of that year and in January and February 1918, I came across numerous earths in the ancient ruins and steep banks of old canals all along the Tigris from the Adhaim to Daur (15 miles North of Samarra) and there were at least half-a-dozen earths in the vicinity of our camp at Bait-al-Khalifa. All but one of these were quite impossible to dig into and sitting up and waiting for the inhabitants to emerge on the bitterly cold nights of the Samarra winter did not attract me, especially as one could not have been certain of getting a shot as the animals did not come out every night.

However, I did try and dig out an earth which went deep into the ground amongst hard stony ruins and lumps of gypsum and after two days hard work captured the owners who were rather badly mauled in the process. I have already described, in a recent number of B. N. H. S. Journal, the method by which one of these captured, and no doubt terrified, beasts gave me an extraordinarily powerful blow on the leg. The ♀ which was the bigger of the pair weighed 25 lbs. and the ♂ 23 lbs., these weights being taken as they lay directly after they had been killed. We eat them both and they were excellent. In the Adhaim area they used to come down and drink in the pools left in the otherwise dry bed of the river; near BAIT-AL-KHALIFA there was no water at all available for them, except the nightly dew or when rain fell. From my observations it appeared that these animals partially hibernate during the winter and most certainly do not leave their burrows every night. There are usually several entrances to one burrow, but as they are all quite close to each other, they can hardly be regarded as bolt holes such as are usually utilized by Foxes.

LEPUS DAYANUS CONNORI.—*Connor's Hare*.—I found this species very common wherever there was dry cover all along the Tigris as far North as Daur and on the Euphrates from Felija to Hit, the only area in which I served on the latter river. They provided excellent sport if one had a gun and many were brought to bag during January 1916 when my Regiment was marching up the Tigris to the Kut relief operations.

A close season was eventually instituted and I think these animals were pro-

tected from March till end of August. I came across young ones in April as well as in July. The following bags may be interesting :—

3-12-16	..	..	Near Kut el-Amarah	..	..	..	..	2
10-11-13-1-17	..	..	do.	..	..	..	..	4
19-20-24-2-17	..	..	do.	..	..	..	..	6
4-3-17	..	..	Near Aziziyeh (R. Tigris)	..	..	..	..	5
2-3-7-17	..	..	Euphrates Barrage (Shot as N. H. Specimens)	..	..	..	..	5
27-30-9-17	..	..	Shatr-el-Adhaim	..	..	..	..	3
6-7-10-16-10-17	..	..	do.	..	..	..	..	4

On 4th February 1918 near Samarra while on the march 3 hares broke through our column and a sepoy killed one with the butt of his rifle. This specimen I sent the B. N. H. S. and at the time I noted that it was very rufous on the flanks and had fine thick fur.

It was a very common occurrence when on the line of march for the protecting troops on the flanks to put up numerous hares which invariably became completely bewildered and charged through the marching column. I frequently noticed that when hares ran off across the open plain, they always lay up in the first piece of cover, however small, or in a small ditch, nullah or broken piece of ground where they could be at once followed up and brought to bag. Often one tiny patch of open scrubby cover near the river would contain the best part of a dozen hares. In very thick cover they were scarce.

FELIS CARACAL.—*The Caracal*.—I never saw any species of this animal in Mesopotamia, but while in camp at Bait-al-khalifa, Samarra—a bit of a naturalist amongst our Cis-frontier Pathans described an animal to me which fitted in with the description of a Lynx or CARACAL, and which he said lived in a den leading off a deep hole amongst the ruins, and he used to sit up by night and try and shoot it. An animal of sorts did live there, but I am quite sure it was not a Caracal, as the only food supply near by was one covey of see-see.

The only Caracal I shot in India was on the Indus near Dera Ismail Khan. It was put up in thick cover where small game was abundant.

GAZELLE MARICA.—*The Marica Gazelle*.—As far as I can remember, not having my complete diaries handy, I first of all came across a Gazelle in Mesopotamia in the area between Baghdad on the Tigris and Feluja on the Euphrates, in the middle of March 1917, but as I never secured any specimens I can offer no remarks on their size, markings, or type of horns. Gazelle were also very plentiful near Feluja, but west of the Euphrates, and evidently dropped their young during April and early May, at which season the Arabs used to bring dozens round our camps to sell to the troops as pets. As far as I could make out, single youngsters were just as common as pairs. Out of a couple of dozen that I tried to bring up with the aid of goats only two survived for any length of time, and in fact I don't think more than half-a-dozen was successfully reared in the whole brigade.

A large number died because they were brought in too young, and we eventually discovered that the only hope of saving the youngsters was to turn them loose with the foster mother and leave them to look after themselves entirely. They began to graze very soon after they were born and quickly became exceedingly tame. They strayed far when feeding, but a whistle would bring them galloping and bounding in at once. To me, what was a most extraordinary thing, was the way the little beggars swam. Two, that a Subadar of mine had successfully reared, were out grazing near one of our posts which protected a bridge over a large irrigation canal. The two Gazelle, who were then possibly 6 weeks' old, were feeding on the other side of the canal, which had steep banks over 30 feet high, with a perpendicular drop of a few feet at the bottom and was 40 to 50 feet wide and about 10 feet deep. The Subadar whistled, and the little beggars unhesitatingly plunged into the stream and swam across swiftly with the greatest of ease! I was absolutely amazed at the performance. The little buck died of some disease in the head or perhaps from some animals getting into the brain

through the ears, when he was 2 months' old, but I saved the doe, who became very tame and made a charming pet, until she eventually died in Palestine in October 1918, after I had her nearly 18 months. They grazed freely on almost all desert grasses and herbage, this being their staple food, but they also liked crushed barley, gram and dhal, as well as dried fruits, dates and sugar. Both when young and full grown they uttered a peculiar guttural grunt, like a very bass and throaty "ba-a" but clipped short. The Arabs told me that the does always came in from the desert to drop their young in the cover and seclusion of the spring crops near the river, and that was why they caught such large quantities of the youngsters.

The young become very fleet of foot within a few days of being born, and then are almost impossible to catch. In February 1918 when my doe was nearly a year old, she was chased the best part of 10 miles out of camp by a couple of Suigis (Persian Grey hounds). This was at 2-30 in the afternoon; and at 7-30 the next morning she returned furtively to the camp, found my tiny tent and tucked herself away in a corner under the bed for the rest of the day! Once when I had been away for some weeks and returned to my company, her joy was so great that she nearly choked herself in her anxiety to get to me, for in those days, to prevent her wandering too far, I had her tied to her foster mother goat by a 20 feet piece of rope. This Gazelle was very attached to her foster mother and never left her up till the time she died, which I believe was due to influenza, as it was during the great epidemic of October 1918. Curiously enough the foster mother died a few weeks later.

GAZELLE—Sp.—The first comment I wish to make on the B.N.H.S. Journal's notes is that all the masks came from Samarra so that the 6 labelled Mesopotamia should really read Samarra, and their dates 15th and 20th January 1918. They were probably indifferently labelled by me and the date of receipts in Bombay noted against them. It is most unfortunate that I should have sent no skins when so many passed through my hands. Of course I imagined that they were the Persian Gazelle, and consequently thought no more about the matter. When out shooting I usually kept the heads and as the remainder of the party preferred the skins, all were satisfied.

These Gazelles were found in vast and numerous herds; on the undulating plain 15 to 20 miles N. E. of Samarra I have often seen from 400 to 600 Gazelle around us during January and February. Herds varied in size, from a dozen to nearly two hundred animals. Several nice bucks would be found in quite small herds, but large herds were chiefly composed of females. I never came across any horned female; and as recorded in your notes I, too, was much struck by the extraordinary whiteness of the mask in the older animals. I frequently went out with the L. A. M. B. Cars on patrol and, during halts when the supply tenders were left behind, we used to hunt the Gazelle with light Ford cars and sometimes even with motor cycles. The weapons used were shot guns, with the cartridges cut round the centre wad, so that the charge left the barrel like a bullet, and it was a case of a "kill" or clean miss and no wounding. The method adopted was to slowly follow a herd until right on their heels, which could always be done by gradually closing up to the herd without really frightening them. The car was then let out and the herd would bound off at top speed—after a spell of this the bucks invariably left the herd and after them we went, all out, until the shootable bucks were gradually worn down and overtaken and then shot at a few yards range. I most strongly disapproved of the callous and brutal method of chasing a herd in a car, and pumping lead indiscriminately into it with a magazine rifle, where far more animals were wounded and got clean away, than were ever brought to bag. As might be expected they were most excellent to eat. Some does that had been shot in the middle of January and which I examined contained embryos in the foetus stage. Some of the larger heads I measured were $13\frac{1}{2}$ ", 13", $12\frac{1}{2}$ ", 12", $11\frac{1}{2}$ ", $11\frac{1}{2}$ ", 11", 11", $10\frac{1}{2}$ "

and many smaller. Two cleaned carcasses with the heads off, that I weighed, were 23 lbs. and 18 lbs.

Gazelles, whether of this or another species, were reported very plentiful in the desert between Samarra and Tekrit on the right bank of the Tigris, but I never saw any specimens, heads or skins.

Sus—Sp.—*Wild Boar*.—I first came across the Wild Pig of Mesopotamia in the thick, thorny and almost impenetrable scrub in some of the loops of the R. Tigris on the right bank just downstream of Kut-el-amarah, at the end of 1916 and early in 1917; but as they only came out of the cover by night I failed to secure any specimens, though our patrols frequently saw the animals after dark. During the pursuit to Bagdad of the defeated Turkish Forces in March 1917, Pigs were found plentiful on the left bank of the Tigris wherever the cover was suitable and though I frequently saw them during my beats for Black Partridge I never actually got a shot at any of them. There appeared to be none on the Euphrates near Feinja and the Hindiyeh Barrage, but probably the cover was unsuitable. In July and August, 1917, I found them plentiful on a small scrub cover island in the middle of the Tigris, a few miles downstream of Bagdad. At that time of the year, the river was so low that on the east the island was joined to the left bank by a broad, muddy depression in which a few shallow pools were situated. At night the Pig used to come and drink from these pools as well as from the river itself on the west. On several occasions on moonlight nights I sat up in "hides" near the river and pools to try and shoot one of these animals, but met with little success.

In September and October 1917 we used to ride them in the country near the Shatt-el-adhaim and have great sport, while also a good many were shot. They seemed to run bigger than the Indian Boar, and were very plentiful. At this time of the year there were many sounders of half grown pigs. These animals were quite easy to shoot at night, as there were only a very few pools where they came to drink, but by day they were hard to turn out of the cover, which was so thick and thorny as to be quite impenetrable in many places. I once put up a very large grey Boar by day, but could not get hold of a rifle in time to have a shot at him. In the early mornings shortly after dawn one used to see small parties returning over the plain to thick scrub and cover in the bed of the Adhaim. I should have secured a few skulls, but the third element amongst my men, usually smashed them up and eat them. It ought not to be very hard to secure specimens and skulls for examination.

In early 1918 we found Pig plentiful in the thick scrub on the left bank of the Tigris near Daur (North of Samarra).